



PRESS RELEASE

# Baker-Polito Administration Awards \$1 Million to Support Broadband Connectivity in Blandford

Blandford gets \$1 million in Last Mile Program funds, part of more than \$19.5 million to expand broadband in 22 towns across Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

12/29/2017

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito

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**BOSTON** — Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced a \$1 million Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program award to the town of Blandford to design, engineer and construct a municipally-owned, broadband network. This grant will enable the town, in partnership with Westfield Gas and Electric, to

bring broadband connectivity to at least 96 percent of homes and businesses. The Last Mile Infrastructure grant program has awarded more than \$19.5 million to 22 towns, representing 13,000 homes and businesses, to support efforts to secure broadband connectivity in communities without commercial broadband options.

“Expanding access to high-speed, broadband internet is critical to providing opportunities to local businesses, residents, students and families,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “We are committed to supporting our municipalities by working with them to bring reliable connectivity to communities in Central and Western Massachusetts through the Last Mile program.

In November, Governor Baker signed [An Act providing for immediate capital improvement needs of the Commonwealth](#), which included \$45 million for broadband infrastructure to provide new capital funding to hasten efforts to close the broadband gap for unserved, or Last Mile, communities and continue infrastructure investments in the Commonwealth-owned, 1,200-mile fiber-optic network *MassBroadband 123* network.

“We are pleased to partner with the Town of Blandford to provide more resources and access to commercial high-speed internet,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** “We understand the critical nature of these connections, and are eager to continue working with our partners in the legislature and on the local level to ensure that every community is able to pursue broadband projects that match its needs.”

[In May 2016, the Baker-Polito Administration launched a new Last Mile leadership team and a new framework](#) to accelerate implementation of broadband projects in unserved or underserved communities. This effort has supported multiple efforts to expand broadband coverage in Western and North Central Massachusetts. To date, 42 out of the 54 unserved or partially-served Last Mile towns have complete, ongoing, or planned projects that will deliver broadband connectivity, which have been supported by the Commonwealth through either a direct grant for a municipal-led Last Mile project, or a solution from a private provider.

“We are proud of the progress our Last Mile leadership team has made to close the connectivity gap across Central and Western Massachusetts,” **said Housing and Economic Development Secretary Jay Ash.** “Broadband infrastructure is critical infrastructure in today’s connected world, which is why we created the Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program to pursue collaborative solutions and give unserved communities access to important capital.”

The Town of Blandford will work with Westfield Gas and Electric to design, build, own and operate a municipally-owned fiber-to-the-home broadband network. The community has committed to at least 96 percent coverage with broadband speeds which will exceed the Federal Communication Commission’s definition of broadband over a network which will be future-proof with respect to the demand for

broadband speed. With coverage of over 60 road miles, and 1,400 utility poles, the network will provide broadband to all homes located on the town's public roads.

"The ability to have fiber to the home is absolutely critical for the long term stability of the town and ability to attract new residents to our community," **said Adam Dolby, chairman of the Blandford Selectboard.** "This project would not be possible without the dedicated commitment of our Municipal Light Board and the incredible support (both logistical and financial) from the Baker-Polito Administration. We are excited to begin working with Westfield Gas & Electric on our implementation."

"Today's award to Blandford insures yet another rural community in western Massachusetts will overcome the digital divide," **said State Senator Adam G. Hinds.** "The community leaders who have devoted countless hours to develop this plan should be commended, and I truly appreciate the support of the Baker-Polito Administration, the MBI and Westfield Gas and Electric which helped Blandford finalize its dream of designing, engineering and constructing a municipally-owned, state-of-the-art, broadband network."

"This is exciting news for one of the smallest communities in the Commonwealth and one of the most challenging in terms of a complete broadband expansion. Thank you to the Baker-Polito Administration, as well as the MBI, for adding another town to the 21st century," **said Representative Smitty Pignatelli.** "Your continued and constant support of broadband expansion is incredibly meaningful to Blandford, and all the other towns throughout Massachusetts awaiting broadband connectivity."

The Last Mile Infrastructure Grant Program for a Municipally-owned Broadband Network is modeled on the MassWorks grant program. This program is only available to Last Mile towns where the value of the award has been pre-determined and published by the Massachusetts Broadband Institute.

The program is modeled on the Commonwealth's successful MassWorks Infrastructure Program, a flexible, competitive grant program that funds local infrastructure projects that unlock economic growth. In addition, the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) and the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative (MBI) will continue to assist municipalities that wish to partner with private broadband providers, or explore alternative solutions.

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